

A Time of Darkness

From a Time of Peace... To a Time of Darkness

It is now six years since the Battle of Endor, when the Rebel Alliance successfully destroyed the second Death Star, and Darth Vader and the Emperor met their fates. In the months immediately following that decisive victory, there was a joyous uprising throughout the galaxy. The Emperor's tyrannical bureaucracy collapsed and the Imperial Fleet was forced into retreat among the planetary systems still firmly under its military control.

The Rebel Alliance, guided by Mon Mothma, then announced the establishment of a New Republic. Its provisional seat of government was to be Coruscant, the ruling world of the Imperial System.

It was a time of peace and celebration. Unfortunately, as things developed, the peace was short-lived... and the new confederation proved to be a fragile one.

Soon afterward, the Imperials, in cooperation with the Emperor's Ruling Circle, managed to consolidate control over roughly a fourth of the galaxy. Whole systems became fortresses, bristling with firepower.

Mon Mothma, for her part, seemed determined to model the New Republic on the old ----- ignoring the obvious fact that the stability of the Old Republic had depended on the now-extinct warrior society of *Jedi Knights*.

So it was that a brief period of celebration was followed by years of struggle. The now-infamous Grand Admiral Thrawn, last of the Emperor's powerful warlords, mounted a deft assault on the fledgling Republic. Others followed his lead -- and production of war technologies expanded rapidly on all the Imperial worlds.

The Alliance very quickly found itself on the defensive, as the Imperials gradually regained strength, pushing back the Alliance until the majority of worlds -- including the vital Imperial System-- fell once again under Imperial control.

For a time it looked as if a New Empire was about to emerge from the ashes of the old... but that very possibility triggered a power struggle of immense proportions. *Who* would sit in the Emperor's throne? Who had the right -- and the *might*?

The question was no sooner asked than it was answered -- with *violence*. Powerful Admirals and Fleet Commanders took up arms against each other, and against the Emperor's Ruling Circle, in ferocious contention for control of the Empire.

The Alliance Seizes the Day

The mutinous strife among Imperials was a golden opportunity for the beleaguered Alliance. Using all the resources at their disposal, the Rebels delivered stinging blows against the feuding armies. Star destroyers captured in the Battle of Endor conducted highly effective hit-and-run sorties into the war zones, sowing chaos and confusion among all the warring factions.

As our story opens, amidst the chaos of civil war, old friends have fallen...and other old friends are on a mission of rescue. These are the brave fighters of the Rebel Alliance, their friendships forged during the endless struggle for freedom. Over the years they have become battle-hardened, perhaps...but they have also grown wise in the ways of the heart.

"The Force is Strong In Your Family..."

In the peaceful months after the Battle of Endor, Han Solo and Princess Leia Organa were married.

And in the years that followed, Leia gave birth to two children, twins -- a son and a daughter. The Force was strong in both of the children. Indeed, after Luke and Leia, it is said that they are the Hope of the Galaxy. In the time of our saga the children, safely hidden from the prying eyes of the dark side, are being nurtured and educated for the destiny that lies ahead.

Their mother, herself a Jedi, has entered training under a Jedi Master. Where could Leia find such a teacher, now that Obi-Wan Kenobi, Master Yoda, and her father Anakin Skywalker have passed on? As we know, she didn't have far to look.

The Ordeal of Luke Skywalker

A boy does not become a man without being tested. A callow youth, no matter what his destiny portends, does not become a Jedi without risking all. Many the would-be hero died, lightsaber in hand, after commencing his quest for knighthood and greatness.

Indeed, if Jedi Knighthood were merely a matter of enthusiasm and desire, the ranks of the Jedi might have swollen to millions...

But to become a fully-trained and realized Jedi was always a formidable undertaking, at best. To become a Jedi Master, empowered to train and initiate others, was nearly impossible.

Luke Skywalker was a most fortunate apprentice -- he had no less than two teachers, and they were two of the greatest Jedi Knights who ever lived.

The first was Obi-Wan Kenobi, the man who had instructed Luke's father, in the ways of Jedi Knighthood and the use of the Force. The second was Yoda, a 900-year-old Jedi Master who had been Obi-Wan's own teacher.

Personally trained by these two great Jedi and linked to their strength and wisdom through the power of the Force, Luke rose quickly through the initial stages of Jedi knowledge. Thus he became instrumental in the overthrow of his father, the fall of the Emperor, and the restoration of the Republic.

And yet... Luke's teachers nearly despaired over his willingness to disregard the advice of those older and wiser than himself -- and his failure to come to terms with his hotheaded recklessness. At times it seemed he was even on the verge of following the selfish and willful road that leads to the dark side, in which the vast potentials of Jedi power are directed toward the triumph of the will, self aggrandizement, and the enslavement of the many by the few...

Tempered by the Realities of War

Inevitably, in the course of war's travail, Luke Skywalker came face-to-face with Darth Vader, the Empire's most brutal enforcer. During a vicious lightsaber battle Vader severed Luke's right hand -- and then revealed the shattering truth that he was Luke's father!

Luke survived the encounter, mentally shaken, and had his missing hand replaced by a synthetic one. But a few years later Luke and Vader faced off again...and again their lightsabers clashed. Filled with rage against his father's betrayal, Luke fought with a frenzy that took him to the very edge of victory and madness. With his lightsaber pressed against his father's throat, a movement away from committing patricide -- Luke suddenly understood that if he gave another inch to his hatred, he would belong to the dark side -- forever.

When the evil Emperor, Supreme Master of the dark side of the Force, turned the fullness of his malevolence against Luke, Anakin Skywalker suddenly awoke from the curse that had imprisoned him for so long... Shedding the bleak and soulless identity of Darth Vader, Anakin took the full force of his Dark Master's evil lightning upon himself -- and hurled the Emperor to his death.

As Anakin Skywalker died, Luke Skywalker could only rejoice to see his father released into the light, at last rejoining the Company of Jedi that he had abandoned so many years before.

The life of Luke Skywalker was no ordinary human drama. A lesser man would have succumbed or been destroyed. But Luke, the young farmboy with the destiny of a Jedi, was no ordinary youth. He became a man, in maturity and responsibility...and he became a Master, because he had the greatest Ally of all.

A Jedi's Greatest Ally is the Force

The Jedi's use of the Force is his greatest skill and his most difficult achievement. The Force is an energy field created by all living things: it surrounds and penetrates the entire galaxy...but it does not fall to everyone to use it as a source of insight and power.

A Jedi, from the beginning, must do what most men cannot: develop a sensitivity to the very existence of the Force. He must actually feel it, feel his oneness with it, feel it tangibly flowing through him, and then his conscious awareness must join the Force, so that the knowledge available through the Force becomes his own.

At some point a Jedi learns to abandon reliance on his own mind and its effort. He learns to stretch out with his feelings, to let go of his limited idea of himself, and to move with the deeply instinctive levels of his being. By listening, by becoming peaceful, by turning his attention to the Force, he finds that place where his individuality is joined to the knowledge and power of the Universe.

Powers of the Jedi

Through the long years of struggle, Luke grew more and more adept in the skills of a Jedi.

He had an increasing ability to feel the Force in himself and others, and to know the thoughts and feelings of others, know their intentions. Through the Force, he could even sense the moment when an entirely mechanical opponent would strike.

He could sense the presence of another Jedi, even across great distances, and take the measure of a Jedi's strength in the Force, or whether the dark side had infected him. He could feel disturbances of every kind in the Force. With the eyes of a Jedi he could see events taking place in another room or across the galaxy. He could glimpse the future, in its many chains of probability... and gauge which path events were most likely to follow.

His enhanced senses and abilities, always a result of attunement with the living energy around him, gave him the ability to move objects without physical contact...even large and heavy objects. He had come to understand the words of Master Yoda: "Size matters not. The only difference is in your mind."

Like his father, he could deflect a blaster bolt with his hand...or rip a piece of machinery from its anchor bolts. Like Obi-Wan Kenobi, he could create great sounds that stirred fear and sent enemies scrambling for cover.

He knew the moment to strike with the lightsaber...and the moment to step back. He could navigate a ship by instinct alone. He could do astounding feats of acrobatics and make incredible leaps. He had the ability to withstand great pain, fatigue, hunger, and thirst. He could transfer a portion of his life energy to another...and accelerate healing in himself and others.

And, with a word or gesture, he could create thoughts and feelings in the weak-minded...sometimes even in the minds of the strong.

Instead of growing proud as he acquired greater knowledge and skill, Luke Skywalker became more unpresuming. He recognized that he drew his strength not from himself, but from the energy of life itself. And he became aware that he had just begun to plumb the depths of the possible.

For it is said the ancient Jedi Knights (including Master Yoda) had many more skills than these -- even the power to manipulate the molecular structure of the universe, to live beyond death, and to guide the path of humankind in righteousness. And there lies the key -- for a true Jedi, no matter how far he progresses, does not use his power for its own sake, or for personal ends, but for the good of others.

Luke Skywalker, the man, is adept at all the principal powers and practices of a Jedi...and he stands at the threshold of awakening to the legendary powers of the great Masters of old...

But, as we shall see, others, committed to the path of the dark side, are also gaining access to powerful secrets...Luke is not alone in his quest for Mastery.

As Luke's father once said, during the time when he served the greatest known wielder of the dark side of the Force, the Emperor: "The ability to destroy a planet -- or even a whole system -- is insignificant next to the power of the Force."

Go carefully, Luke. You have won much...but the war is not yet over. Go carefully, and remember -- the Force will be with you...always.

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